



# 2021 Year in Review

Dear readers,

Following nearly a year of isolation and seemingly apocalyptic events, 2021 suspended us in limbo, hesitant, and sometimes afraid, to move forward as we repeatedly felt echoes of the fears and anxieties we had hoped to leave in 2020. For our part, *The Tech* finally unlocked the doors of our physical newsroom, powered on sleeping monitors and dusted off desks, and welcomed all of our editors and staff, new and old, to our beloved hexagonal table; but like many other organizations on campus and elsewhere, we faced the same challenges of recalling neglected routines, rediscovering a rhythm for meetings, and rebuilding our community from laggy video calls to in-person interactions.

Perhaps this awkward recollection of previous practices was also felt by the Institute itself, reflected in the year's news stories — which

centered around plans for campus returns, constantly shifting COVID-19 policies, and the continuation of Institute initiatives and construction projects put on pause during the pandemic. Rather than turn its attention to upcoming work, MIT understandably prioritized recovery and prevention, slowly ramping up its pre-pandemic activities and implementing safety measures to mitigate the risk of an on-campus outbreak. Professors, PIs, and other campus leaders were asked to make contingency plans to account for positive cases in their classes and communities, and we all became familiar with the patterns of daily attestations, twice-weekly testing, and vaccine clinics.

Even so, the magic of being on campus endures in spite of face coverings and nasal swabs. The hours of remote school that stretched endlessly in our quarantine rooms seem to zoom (pun

unintended) by in the common spaces and dormitory lounges that we now share. Whether putting our heads together to work on a problem set, sitting side-by-side in a dining hall booth, starting a conversation with a deskmate in class, cheering on a performing group's exhilarating return to stage, reassuring a friend with a comforting hug, or simply picking up a print copy of *The Tech*, we are graced with small reminders everyday of what we had missed during those three remote semesters.

Moreover, we have had the opportunity to re-experience firsts — the first in-person orientation, activities midway, first day of classes, Ring Delivery, midterms, research projects, dance showcases, capstone presentations, final exams, and Independent Activities Period since the pandemic started — and reimagine how these firsts are carried out by adapting to our chang-

ing campus, newly filled with students infusing these milestones with their own ideas and energy. Beyond redefining existing firsts, there are also signs of students pioneering new firsts: the opening of New Vassar, the creation of an artificial intelligence and decision-making major, and the establishment of a graduate student union. These new firsts inspire confidence that not only will life at MIT resume as it did pre-pandemic, but it will also evolve, with students driving change at the Institute level as they continue to advocate for the causes most important to them and sustain the strong bonds of their communities, persisting through pandemics, renovations, and any other turmoil that comes our way.

In my time so far at MIT, it has been my greatest and most precious honor to serve as editor in chief of *The Tech* for two volumes. I began my tenure on campus, a

bright-eyed first year, until we were unceremoniously evicted as the pandemic began; spent a stifling sophomore year overseeing our virtual publications remotely; and returned to campus to conclude my occupancy as a slightly jaded junior. My position has granted me the unique opportunity of reading hundreds of articles from perspectives spanning MIT, has allowed me to document an unprecedented period of Institute history, and has undeniably shaped my past two years of life. As I bittersweetly pass my torch to a new editor in chief, I hope that just as these weekly issues of *The Tech* accompanied so many aspects of my MIT experience, this newspaper can continue to serve future students in the same way — recording the ups, downs, and all arounds of their time at the 'vtvte.

— Kristina Chen '23  
Volume 141 Editor in Chief



Wenbo Wu '23

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*The Tech* (ISSN 0148-9607) is published on Thursdays during the academic year (except during MIT vacations) and monthly during the summer by The Tech, Room W20-483, 44 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. Subscriptions are \$50.00 per year (third class). **POSTMASTER:** Please send all address changes to our mailing address: The Tech, P.O. Box 397029, Cambridge, Mass. 02139-7029. **TELEPHONE:** Editorial: (617) 253-1541. Business: (617) 258-8324. Facsimile: (617) 258-8226. **Advertising, subscription, and typesetting rates available.** Entire contents © 2000 *The Tech*. Printed by Graphic Developments, Inc.

The Institute's draft of its long-awaited first five-year Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Action Plan disappointed even the student committee members who advised the plan's creation with its lackluster, performative, and noncommittal statements. Work toward hiring department diversity officers and implementing measurable change as suggested by students moved at a snail's pace, disguised as progress by countless emails from senior leadership reiterating MIT's values and promising plans without real commitments to action. The final version of MIT's

*Is this what an MIT education looks like?*

**By Danielle Geathers, Kelvin Green II, Tyler Lawal, Myles Noel, Brian Williams, and Sienna Williams**

“Why are you dwelling on all these things that are so far in the past? Maybe if you want to study history, become a history major.” As stated by an MIT student in the 1990s, there is a prevalent sentiment that students at MIT, especially Black students, should focus on the future and forgo reflecting on the dark past. Our present-day curriculum requirements seem to agree with this student’s assessment. Each year, hundreds of MIT students graduate lacking a fundamental understanding of the effects that anti-Black racism and other systems of oppression have on our present-day technologies, even our own decision-making.

“You’re walking in the halls. There’s no one around and the lights are out. Out of the corner of your eye you spot him; *Average black male around 5ft 6” wearing a blue backpack*,” is the opening to an email sent by East Campus residents during last Black History Month to their dorm community. These MIT students’ poor attempt at so-called “comedy” is overshadowed by the covertly racist rhetoric — “*Average black male around 5ft 6” wearing a blue backpack*,” being repeated no less than nine times throughout the email. For those who’ve seen the “It’s Intuitively Obvious” series (1996) produced by MIT, the EC email (2020) is strikingly reminiscent of the fear and ignorance rooted in the minds of the 1993 white members of Phi Beta Epsilon Fraternity who shouted “Fuck Chocolate City. Fuck all niggers,” to a group of Black MIT students walking towards their dorm along Amherst Alley.

From being founded by a slaveholder in 1861 to vandalism by swastika on the 2019 Black History Month display, the Institute has largely neglected the goal of reckoning with its own racist history. The work of the MIT & Slavery course is critical to this goal, but its research findings have been limited in their ability to create radical shifts in our Institute curriculum. This institutional failure leads to racism continually rearing its head in the perspectives shared by our students. It is difficult to hold anyone respon-

Climate Action Plan for the Decade is flimsy in comparison to the magnitude of the Institute's role as a scientific world leader at the forefront of research and innovation. Locally, neighboring institutions like Harvard and the City of Boston proclaimed that they would divest from the fossil fuel industry. Globally, nations converged to pledge funds as they acknowledged the rate at which the threat of climate change is accelerating. Still, MIT has yet to make a move to divest, despite support from both students and faculty, and the new climate action plans' research proposals, while optimistic, will barely be underway before the climate disasters they seek to prevent become irreversible realities. Beyond these repeated calls to action, students also used the Opinion section as a platform to highlight the mental health difficulties faced by our peers and to stand in solidarity with MIT's Black and Asian populations as acts of violence made headlines across the nation.

sible for what they do not know. It is doubly difficult to hold someone responsible for what they were not taught, despite receiving a so-called internationally-renowned and respectable education. Yet, as an institution for learning, we have the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and change this pattern.

As an Institute, we currently have strict standards for what an MIT student must know to graduate. From being able to swim to understanding the replication of DNA, MIT has mandated that students take General Institute Requirements (GIRs) in the fields of mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and the humanities, seeing these as critical to a student's education. But by that same logic, why does MIT fail to teach the genesis of the technology we use today? And how it is often rooted in exploitation of land, socio-economic status, even another human's mind and body?

MIT requires its students to demonstrate their ability to swim four lengths of a swimming pool to earn their degree. And yet, this proactive approach designed to prevent students from drowning in the Charles isn't replicated in an approach to prevent students from creating, contributing, or approving the use of technologies that perpetuate systemic racism at home and abroad?

Our concern for the curriculum is not a new one. In 2015 the Black Students' Union published a list of demands mandating an immersion studies course (BSU 2) that has only been avoided on the merits of its proposed implementation. We do not propose to be the experts on how this knowledge should be implemented in the MIT curriculum, but we remain experts on our experiences as Black students and have conviction that we cannot continue to conduct business as usual. The sloth-like pace of MIT's progress towards an inclusive educational environment is why Black student experiences today match the experiences of Black alumni for decades with uncanny accuracy. Their voices still echo through the Infinite yearning for change.

It is MIT's responsibility to educate its students who become leaders in their communities, the world, and beyond. It

And, after years of op-eds and grassroots activism, graduate students collectively organized to form a Graduate Student Union to more effectively campaign for quality of life, academic, and work improvements for the Institute's largest community of students, researchers, and workers.

Many students spend their entire time at the Institute initiating, organizing, and advocating for the changes they want to see at our institution, and often, these students graduate before work at the Institute level even begins. While the words they write for the Opinion section are just a fraction of the labor they have dedicated to establishing a better MIT, it is our pleasure to contribute in a small way to the monuments they build, and we hope that in the new volume and the coming years, the future they imagine in their op-eds can become reality at the Institute.

—Kristina Chen '23,  
Volume 141 Editor in Chief

is a failure that most of our department curricula are devoid of requisite studies on social inequities, absent of historical examples of the human cost of both scientific and technological advancement, and barren of the institutional history lessons which work to lead students to be better than many of the historical figures we learn from in our classes. A Course 7 student graduating during the COVID-19 pandemic without knowledge of the Tuskegee syphilis experiments is unprepared. A Course 20 student who does not know the story of Henrietta Lacks is unprepared. A Course 6 student without an understanding of the effects of implicit bias in machine learning is unprepared. And the list goes on. How many more students will graduate ignorant of the inequities and injustices that developed and continue to impact their field of study?

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the first "It's Intuitively Obvious" production, a series of videotapes depicting MIT students discussing issues of race. Will it be another 25 years before our curriculum meets its educational duties and responsibilities? We need allies in this effort. Students, staff, faculty, administrators and Corporation members — we are asking for your help to ensure that before we turn our brass rats and leave this side of the Charles, we are prepared; prepared to face the rising challenges of an ever awakening world. We must reimagine our MIT curriculum and then, and only then, can we say MIT has succeeded in its mission to "advanced knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century."

*Danielle Geathers is a member of the MIT Class of 2022.*

*Kelvin Green II is a member of the MIT Class of 2022.*

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# Elitist and racist egg donation ads have no place in student newspapers

*Most ads fail to disclose the risks of egg donation process while offering vast financial compensation*

**By *The Tech* Editorial Board**

If you are a female MIT student with the last name Wu, Huang, or Chen, you may have received an email in the past two weeks with the subject line “亞洲精英 Outstanding Asian.” The email offered \$50,000 in compensation for an Asian egg donor, ideally a “21-year-old Chinese MIT student, top in her class,” with “several awards in high school and university.” This concerning request is actually a permutation of an advertisement that The Tech has run twice in the past decade, once in 2012 and once in 2017. The ad, paid for and submitted by the same individual, has not changed much over the years, though the most recent email iteration has swapped out “genius” for “outstanding” and more than doubled the compensation from \$20,000 to \$50,000. Both the 2012 and 2017 appearances of the ad disturbed MIT community members for its racial stereotyping, tactless wording, and lack of acknowledgment of the medical risks involved with egg donation.

Unfortunately, this is not the only advertisement soliciting egg donations that The Tech has run or faced criticism for, with similar ads — requesting donors of certain races, heights, eye and hair colors, levels of athleticism, personalities, and minimum SAT scores — printed frequently during the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s. Moreover, MIT is not the only college whose newspaper has made space for these ads. College newspapers at Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale, among others, have also run similar ads seeking egg donations. And it's no coincidence that these schools have a few things in common: Most are Ivy League institutions,

and all are regularly ranked in the top ten among U.S. universities.

The strategic placement of these advertisements in newspapers with an audience of barely-20-something students at “elite” institutions is almost as troubling as the rhetoric found in the advertisements. Some are stereotypical and racist, primarily those that associate Asian women with blanket descriptions like “intelligent” or “high-achieving.” These ads reduce Asian women to commodities and labels that perpetuate the harmful “model minority” myth, which places limiting expectations on the roles Asians can take, erases the countless other traits that these women may possess, and uses Asians as examples of a “successful” or “submissive” minority to oppress more marginalized groups.

An additional common demand of these ads is for standardized test scores and transcripts, as if these arbitrary screenings of how smart a potential egg donor is will correlate with the eventual intelligence of the child. Both standardized testing and grades are often measures of performance and preparation, rather than intelligence, and ads quantifying the value of a woman's oocytes with these metrics subscribe to an already dangerous emphasis on numbers and achievements at universities like MIT. Furthermore, while genetic factors do contribute to intelligence, it's troubling to see ads implying that only an egg donor from a top ten university can ensure that your child matches your intellect. These ads demonstrate scientific ignorance, reducing environmentally influenced, complex traits like intelligence and even personality to "special gifts" that can be selected and purchased in the form of an egg donation.

Another problem with the most recent advertisement is that, like many other ads

requesting certain features from donors, it offers a financial compensation more than five times greater than the usual amount, as determined by the Ethics Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. This remuneration is paid to recognize the "significant time, inconvenience, and discomfort associated with oocyte donation," suggesting that these drawbacks are considerable. Additionally, the magnified compensation further commercializes the specific physical, racial, and intellectual characteristics that these ads entreat, making it such that only those with the financial means can afford "outstanding," Ivy League eggs and resulting in a discomfiting sense of exclusivity surrounding egg donations. Though the Ethics Committee found that many egg donors consider "being able to help someone" their biggest motivation, an ad offering such a large sum of compensation may blur the line and incentivize donation from a less informed individual. For college students at private schools, likely burdened by high tuitions and other costs, the prospect of a full year's worth of tuition could certainly blur these lines. Yet these ads insufficiently disclaim the serious possible harms that could come from egg donation.

The Ethics Committee also advises that all risks related to oocyte donation should be clearly disclosed. The invasive process involves the suppression of the body's natural ovulation cycle and hyperstimulation of the ovaries with follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) through self-injections. High levels of hCG can lead to ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS), which could result in hospitalization or death. Furthermore, the long-term effects are not well studied, but women have reported infertility and psycho-

logical distress after donating. Nonetheless, many ads found in college newspapers do not explain the medical process of egg donation, nor the associated risks in any of their iterations.

We understand that egg donation can help those who are unable to have children, and reproductive medicine has been instrumental in creating families for those who want them. There are companies that can facilitate these procedures while informing all parties and ensuring minimal risk. However, these advertisements that individually target young Asian women at MIT do not properly disclose sufficient information about the process and offer vast financial compensation, making them both racist and dangerous. Often, the ads request that potential donors contact private individuals, rather than a known or reputable egg donation clinic.

In the future, we will not be running egg donation ads that do not include requisite disclaimers addressing the risks involved for egg donors, that originate from private individuals rather than credible agencies or clinics, or that include language suggesting that donors of certain races or from certain schools inherently possess stereotyped traits preferred over those of other donors. We urge student newspapers at our peer institutions to similarly reconsider these factors when choosing whether to print advertisements requesting egg donations.

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## GUEST COLUMN

# The climate is changing, and so must MIT

*As students, we must hold MIT accountable for its climate action — and inaction — to shape the 2021 Climate Action Plan*

**By Sydney Paige Kim and CliMIT Campaign**

As an institution, MIT holds a position of great respect and, consequently, influence. Its graduates and professors are respected entrepreneurs, scientists, astronauts, and political leaders. Its name consistently appears at the top of university rankings. In fact, MIT graduates and professors have earned the fifth most Nobel Prizes of all institutions in the world, and in 2021, *Times Higher Education* ranked MIT fifth in the world. Certainly, in the eyes of the public, MIT is a model institution.

In terms of climate action, however, MIT is *not* a model institution. Today, despite the fact that the planet's carbon budget is set to expire in six years, MIT has yet to commit to divestment or even carbon neutrality. Data on its energy use, water use, and other sustainability-related activities is not publicly accessible, and the majority of information regarding institute investments is completely unavailable.

As MIT's stature stands on the shoulders of public opinion, it is undeniable that it consciously shapes that opinion by filtering the information it discloses. It is undeniable that this silence and secrecy is a means by which MIT obscures its climate action — or,

more aptly, its climate *in*action — in the face of a global emergency. Indeed, with public respect comes privilege, and with privilege comes power. Yet in light of the climate crisis, MIT is misusing its power. MIT is managing its privilege irresponsibly.

We students cannot let this continue.

This spring, MIT is set to release its second-ever Climate Action Plan (CAP), which will serve as a template for the next five years. In its 2015 CAP, MIT pledged to “minimize emission of... global warming agents into the atmosphere” and “devise pathways for adaptation to climate change,” yet those goals lacked a timeline, accountability metrics, actors, and cost estimates. Compared to the diligence and rigor with which MIT conducts its research and academics, its plan to address climate change is strikingly vague.

Meanwhile, MIT has continued to invest in companies that spew the byproducts of fossil fuels into the air. These are fossil fuels that we know heat the planet, flood cities, make people chronically ill, take the lives of children in low-income communities, amplify environmental injustice, uproot villages and ecosystems, and burn homes to the ground. MIT has an enormous responsibility — a responsibility that it is denying, neglecting, and rejecting.

Now, it is up to us, as students, to fulfill *our* responsibility: to push MIT to be the leader it must be in the face of this crisis. The 2021 CAP must contain ambitious, appropriate goals that align with current climate science and include clearly defined actionables. Our responsibility is to talk, sing, write, protest, and ultimately encourage MIT to descend from its perch of privileged ignorance, open its eyes to this accelerating, alarming crisis, and *act*.

To coordinate our actions, the Student Sustainability Coalition recently started a climate action campaign called CliMT. The campaign focuses on four key asks, distilled from a proposal the Student Sustainability Coalition developed to shape the 2021 CAP.

The CliMIT campaign asks that MIT

- set ambitious on-campus sustainability goals,
- implement standards for engagement with private sector actors,
- form avenues for engagement with the public sector, and
- develop and follow a framework for ethical investments.

If MIT adopts these asks as central goals in its 2021 CAP, it would enable the Institute to make significant, appropriate, and much-overdue progress in its climate action.

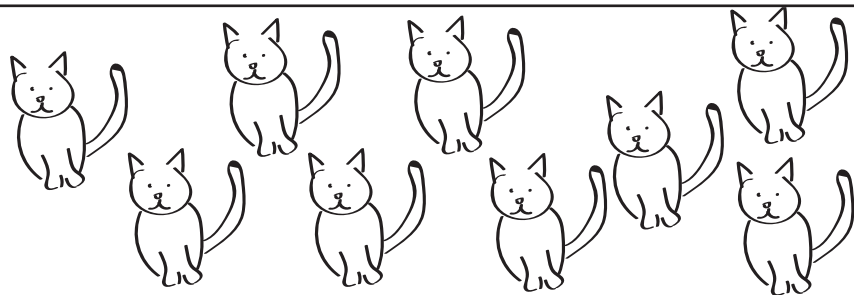
To my fellow students: we must push for a CAP of which we can be proud. We are the scientists, engineers, innovators, and pioneers on which MIT prides itself. We are the problem solvers, critical thinkers, leaders, and collaborators, always on the edge of “cutting-edge” technology. Now is our time to channel our collective strengths and talents to create necessary change.

To members of the MIT administration, Climate Action Advisory Committee, Office of Sustainability, Investment Management Company, and the MIT Corporation:

If you were to emerge from your climate-controlled offices and open your eyes not only to look, but also to see, perhaps your heart would ache for this world. You would see homes, demolished. Dreams, crushed. Photos floating in flood water, memories going up in flames. This world that so deeply respects you is bleeding, and it baffles me that you act as though you do not know.

Indeed, MIT stands on the shoulders of public opinion, and with it, it will fall. MIT also stands on the banks of the Charles River, and with it, its hallways will flood and its reputation will be covered in water stains. Unless MIT changes.

Unless we demand change.



Join The Tech  
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GUEST COLUMN

# Towards a substantive and meaningful DEI strategic action plan

*Citing ‘difficulty’ and ‘decentralization,’ senior leadership fail to create an actionable and antiracist strategic plan*

**By Ufuoma Ovienmhada, Bianca Lepe, EeShan Bhatt, Kayla Storme, Catherine Wong, Zaina Moussa, Orisa Coombs, and Yu Jing Chen**

On July 1, 2020, in light of the national reckoning sparked by the wrongful killings of Black Americans and the massive movement of brand activism, President L. Rafael Reif wrote a letter regarding efforts to address systemic racism at MIT. The main offering of this letter was the promise of a “comprehensive, Institute-wide Strategic Action Plan for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)” which would “establish clear, coordinated Institute-wide objectives.” Less than one year later, MIT senior leadership’s process of overseeing the strategic plan has failed its promise.

In September 2020, the strategic action plan steering team, on which we serve as the undergraduate and graduate student representatives, was tasked with developing the plan. Concurrently, student activists across the Institute tried to leverage the perceived momentum for antiracist action, but senior and faculty leadership repeatedly told students that their concerns would be addressed by the strategic plan (and ignored immediate actions that could be taken to address systemic racism). With this hyperfocus on the strategic plan, much of our time on the committee was spent crafting the overarching strategic priorities and their corresponding commitments. The draft of the strategic plan released in March 2021 indicates that it “attempt[s] to deliver an explicit, directional, and aspirational set of actions for MIT.” However, we witnessed firsthand how the initial drafts we worked on for seven months were, upon being vetted by senior administrators, purged of several meaningful actions. Many recommendations were changed in their underlying mechanisms from “there are existing inequities and here are recommendations to solve them” to “reviewing, evaluating, and assessing if inequities exist.”

These changes in language were even more jarring because of the lack of transparency in how and why they were made. Steering team leadership (John Dozier, Tim Jamison, and Maryanne Kirkbride) were the only members who communicated with MIT’s senior administration directly. Our concerns with the plan unraveling were met with deflections — senior and steering team leadership blaming the current structure of decentralization; senior leadership’s preference for setting low-level goals so the plan is “fully achievable in five years”; and senior leadership’s fear of upsetting faculty and financial donors.

If we — student members of the steering committee who have spent countless hours every week in meetings and on phone calls to push for change — are not listened to, how can we trust that further feedback from the broader community via the engagement sessions will be incorporated? In fact, our queries about incorporating engagement session feedback were met with a non-committal response on making any major changes. When senior leadership privately recalibrates the plan while simultaneously, and publicly, calling for Institute standards, they endanger the trust that the MIT community places in them and, by extension, threaten the success of the strategic plan.

In understanding this threat, we must first define what it might look like to successfully address systemic racism in an academic institution’s strategic plan. We synthesize anti-racist scholarship with our own experiences to define four dimensions.

The first dimension is to **shift power dynamics to reduce the negative impact of hierarchy**. Academia is built on hierarchical processes that are prone to the effects of racism, sexism, and other forms of bias. A strategic plan that shifts power dynamics would align these processes with Institute-wide standards for equity that better democratize decision-making. These standards must apply to any and all procedures where power imbalances or bias can sway an outcome (e.g., graduate admissions, qualifying exams, faculty hiring, and tenure).

The second dimension is to **amplify and prioritize the needs of the most marginalized groups**. Different communities will have unique sets of lived experiences and needs. Any plan to address oppression that does not actively center the voices and priorities of marginalized and underrepresented peoples may include positive ideas but will inevitably be incomplete.

The third dimension is to **enact justice by holding individuals who perpetuate oppression accountable**. Justice cannot exist without accountability. Accountability is about people taking responsibility for harmful behavior and taking action to repair that harm. The strategic plan must create strong accountability and support mechanisms at every administrative level (not just the Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response office) to condemn abusive, prejudiced, and/or racist behavior.

The fourth dimension is to **celebrate and incentivize anti-oppressive allyship and advocacy**. We must better value the contributions and labor from faculty, staff, and

students who advance DEI initiatives. This means incorporating DEI leadership as a factor in hiring, promotion, and fellowships; giving awards to staff and students; and compensating students who participate in Institute-level DEI initiatives.

Senior leadership, whether intentionally or not, have taken actions that are antithetical to the four dimensions we think constitute a successful plan:

Coming off the cusp of grassroots community-wide advocacy and departmental organizing (e.g., RISE and departmental student coalitions), **senior leadership has shifted power back to themselves**, tilting the scales on our commitments to reinforce the de-centralized and hierarchical systems that pervade MIT. Students on the steering committee repeatedly asked for centralized standards and saw that language replaced with “work with department heads” and “convene a working group,” stalling any tangible actions.

By prioritizing the whispers of discontent from large conservative donors and faculty (and maybe even themselves), senior leadership has amplified the wants of the most privileged groups and actively **disregarded the needs of current community members who are hurting the most**. This is best illustrated by senior leadership refusing to fund DEI officers for departments that need but cannot afford them and dodging community space requests from identity groups who feel that they do not have a home on campus. These are actions that are asked for by almost every minority group that this plan claims to serve.

And by watering down the plan in closed-door meetings, they have **dismantled mechanisms to hold them accountable for change** and insulated themselves (and us) from authentic dialogue about what it will take to improve MIT.

The commitments in the strategic plan that are strong have focused largely on the fourth dimension — to celebrate and incentivize allyship and advocacy — **but this by itself only overburdens individuals, rather than iterating on systemic solutions**. The students, staff, and faculty, generally women and people of color, who are already doing that work, do not just deserve awards; we deserve change.

We ask, where do senior leadership see themselves in this plan, other than taking credit for its creation? And will that plan materially improve the lives of those at MIT whom this plan was supposed to serve?

As students on the steering committee, we desired a plan with commitments that extend

beyond its (and our) time at MIT. We have been honored to work alongside all those on the steering team, especially John Dozier, to draft this plan. But the onus for its impact on the MIT community lies squarely on the senior leadership, who have in one hand beckoned for sweeping change and in the other held up stop signs.

MIT leadership has, in the name of “practicality” and “efficiency,” acted without transparency or accountability. If they fail to provide us with a clear response to our proposed changes, it will be another point of evidence that their definition of success for the strategic plan is predicated on its toothlessness, and is in direct conflict with ours. We have no interest in putting our names behind a plan that is mostly performative. We joined the committee to work towards a meaningful vision for a better MIT, and we will reassess our future participation if senior leadership continues to hinder that vision.

*The authors of this article are student members of the MIT Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee.*

*Ufuoma Ovienmhada is a PhD student in Aerospace Engineering, co-president of the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), and a member of the MIT Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee.*

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*Orisa Coombs is an undergraduate student in Mechanical Engineering and a member of the MIT Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee.*

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GUEST COLUMN

# The issue with preaching kindness: a response to Institute-wide communications

*Is MIT capable of real change?*

**By Susanna Chen**

On Aug. 19, President Reif sent out an Institute-wide email calling for a renewed sense of mindfulness and compassion in the MIT community as we approach a new semester. Although this sentiment might seem to mean well, it continues to absolve MIT of its role in deepening the crises of poverty and militarism.

During finals week last semester, my friend and I were assaulted by a homeless man in front of Lobby 7. When he first approached me, my friend stood between us, and in response, the man spat at us and tried to grab me. When we broke free from his hold and crossed Mass. Ave., he voiced racist insults. The MIT Police arrived shortly after to apprehend and handcuff the man and take him to the police station.

In the following days, my friends and I became involved in the drafting of another MIT-wide communication, a message to be sent by Reif in May regarding the incident. The draft of the email also referred to the hostilities which arose among the MIT community

as a result of the Israel-Palestine crisis. Members of the community involved in those tensions on campus were intensely frustrated by the draft’s inadequate and feeble manner of addressing the conflict, as it reduced the political crises to another call for more personal kindness. Ultimately, the administration did not send the email. But it shared themes with Reif’s most recent email: change is but a matter of “offer[ing] each other extra patience and compassion” and being mindful of “differences in power, status, culture and education.”

The Institute frequently tells us that advancement is primarily a matter of good intention. We are told that we are the future’s leaders. We are the trailblazers. We are the visionaries. We have a “higher purpose for our talents.” We “can make important contributions in this existential struggle, in time to make a difference.” However, this belief that progress is inevitable as long as we act a bit more “mindfully” is not only inadequate, but also obscures the root issues that MIT has a responsibility to address.

The assault my friend and I experienced was not primarily due to a lack of “decency,

integrity, humility, respect, kindness and appreciation.” It was a symptom of poverty, which takes away the opportunity to lead lives of dignity from working people, and gentrification, which produces hostility between elite students and the people who are being pushed out. MIT obscures that it and its students hold a larger role in and responsibility to problems of poverty and gentrification in Cambridge (see MIT’s Kendall Square Initiative). We need to go beyond “deliberat[ing] how we treat each other” and internalize the urgency of our responsibility to address the foundational issues that allow incidents such as this to occur.

On the surface, there seems to be nothing immoral in a call for kindness; what wrong is there in an appeal to treat our neighbors with a bit more compassion, especially in a time of such “hate and brutality in our society”? However, MIT, an institution which is supposed to serve as a beacon of education and ideas for the leadership of American society, has a larger responsibility to address society’s greatest contradictions. These calls towards a more inclusive and mindful environment are

disingenuous because they obscure the real causes of crime and the psychological crises of American people, which are poverty and imperialism. Most importantly, they conceal MIT’s role in misleadingly convincing students that they are true agents of change and preventing them from developing a genuine, moral path forward.

We must think critically about the status quo and question MIT’s assumption of inevitable progress. Being a member of the MIT community does not make us the default leaders of the world. If we are serious about our commitment to progress, we must have the courage to go beyond investing in MIT as an agent of change and understand that the institution’s interest in maintaining its power through wealth will always defeat its interest in people. We must wholly engage ourselves as leaders in the struggle for ideological clarity, challenge the ideas of MIT which uphold imperialism, and dispute the assumption that progress inevitably arrives with good intention. As revolutionary activist Grace Lee Boggs said, “We are the leaders we’ve been looking for.”



*How are you doing? Actually? Because I am tired.*

*CW: Mentions of suicide, depression*

I have consistently struggled my way through MIT, and I don't believe I'm stronger for it, nor do I believe it has to be this way. In the past year, it has become even more difficult to perform regularly in classes, due to the pandemic and the stress and grief surrounding the horrifying racial injustices we have seen against the Black and

As an international student, an off-campus student, and a struggling student, I was honestly not prepared to write this even though I knew it was needed. I knew the havoc it would wreak on my mental health, but I decided to undertake this emotional labor because I am worried about myself and my peers. I am not at all surprised by the responses: concern for themselves and peers, burnout, depression, suicidal thoughts, and simply asking that something be done. The suggestions were varied but one thing was consistent: needing a break, clearly not caused by laziness but

- Adding one more class to PE/NE this semester and having a pset-free week before the end of the semester. Students need a break from the firehose, and these changes would provide some respite.
- Students should have access to basic needs and basic care.
  - This means having enough mental health providers, specifically those of

It is heinous to believe that parents are sending off their children to institutions such as MIT believing they will be cared for, and instead, we are met with the most challenging mental health struggles. Drinking from the firehose isn't something to be romanticized, and we deserve better.

friends

```
from new_skills import *  
  
def learnMarketableJobSkills():  
    return linux, OSX, javascript, applescript, perl, python, PHP  
  
if self.interest == True:  
    print "E-mail join@tech.mit.edu"
```

hiking, disconnecting from the world.

the dogs around campus.

## Capture the Moment

## Join Photo at The Tech

[join@tech.mit.edu](mailto:join@tech.mit.edu)



GUEST COLUMN

# With a union, graduate working conditions become an institutional priority

*The GSU is essential for improvements like raises in graduate stipends and funding support*

By Bridget Begg, Yadav Gowda, Sneha Kabaria, Pedro Reynolds-Cuellar, and Gabrielle Robbins

On Sept. 27, nearly 1,000 graduate workers rallied in Hockfield Court to announce the formation of the MIT Graduate Student Union. On Thursday, Oct. 14, just 17 days later, MIT announced a historically unprecedented mid-year raise for all graduate students. This raise is notable not just for its timing but also because it will be entirely centrally funded, circumventing strain on scarce department resources. **By taking decisive collective action and forming a union, graduate students are making our research and working conditions a priority for the vast resources of the Institute.**

MIT claimed the unexpected raise was the result of this year’s endowment gains — MIT saw endowment gains of over \$9 billion over the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. However, MIT’s endowment has also seen a positive return on investment every single year since 2010, a growth totalling \$19.5 billion. Notably, according to the FY2021 Treasurer’s report, MIT’s Net Assets — including endowment, land, buildings, and equipment — currently total over *\$36 billion*. Out of that, \$15 billion are in unrestricted funds — funds whose use MIT has complete control over. To put that number in perspective, \$15 billion could fund stipends at their current rate for every single graduate student for over 50 years. It could pay for dental insurance for every single graduate student *for four thousand years*.

Even at the height of the pandemic in 2020, the worst financial year since the Great Recession, the MIT endowment saw an 8% return on investment. One only needs to look at the massive changes to Kendall Square to see that MIT is not shy about spending its money. In 2015, MIT committed over \$1.2 billion to fund the Kendall Square Initiative, an amount which was nearly 10%

of the endowment at that time. **So why has MIT been reluctant to devote even a fraction of those financial resources to graduate student needs?**

**This reluctance was highlighted during the pandemic.** In May 2020, MIT COVID Relief published an open letter calling for funding extensions for graduate students in programs with fixed-term funding who were affected by the pandemic. Crucially, we called for these extensions to be universal, well-publicized, and centrally funded, because we knew that pandemic-related research delays were widespread, and that disruptions to our research would require serious long-term systemic solutions. MIT COVID Relief estimated universal extensions at a mere \$3.5 million — money MIT is surely good for.

MIT administration rejected this approach. Throughout 2020, they instead forced faculty and departmental administrators to find the money for extensions from their own strapped budgets. Some programs cut or canceled admissions to do so. The central administration provided no guidance to graduate students, many of whom were left to navigate a pandemic with profound uncertainty about their income. Meanwhile, graduate students who requested funding extensions through their departments were often subjected to meeting after meeting, if their requests weren’t outright denied. **While MIT steadily accrued endowment wealth, many graduate students faced unprecedented financial strain.**

It was only in April 2021, a full year after the pandemic began, that the MIT administration finally addressed the issue of pandemic extensions — and only after continued pressure from graduate student advocates. MIT shared an email address that graduate students could use to notify the Office of the Vice Chancellor that they needed a funding extension. This solution was still woefully inadequate: the COVID-19

Research Impact Survey showed that by May 2021 (mere weeks before many graduate students’ funding would end), a majority of students in programs with fixed-term funding were still unaware of the availability of pandemic extensions. The survey also showed that in some programs, 70–80% of current graduate students face ongoing pandemic-related delays to their work. Yet extensions remain an “emergency,” issued on a case-by-case basis; delayed students still have no long-term guarantee of a stipend through completion. **This is a massively inefficient response to the long-term challenges of COVID-19. It punts costs to departments; imposes unnecessary stress and worry for students; and takes time away from what should really matter: our research.**

Compare MIT to Brown University, where graduate students have been unionized since 2018. In April 2020, only a month after the pandemic lockdown began, Brown and the Graduate Labor Organization (Brown’s graduate student union) came to a written agreement to provide blanket funding extensions to every single third-, fourth-, and fifth-year graduate student. Brown students did not have to spend countless hours individually trying to extend their funding — they got to spend that time on their research.

It would be unfair to say that the Brown University administration cares more about their graduate students or is more generous than the Institute. Instead, **by forming a union, Brown graduate students were able to ensure that their research and working conditions are a priority for central administration.** Through their union, they had the power to negotiate for pandemic extensions when they needed them, rather than being subject to the whims of the administration’s attention.

It’s encouraging to see MIT respond to our unionization by finally beginning to mobilize their vast resources to prioritize conditions for graduate workers. As an

employee of an institution whose endowment just grew by \$9 *billion*, **what would you change about your workplace if you could?**

We know graduate students are severely rent-burdened, and we know graduate students need better healthcare. We know MIT cited lack of funding in refusing to meet RISE (Reject Injustice through Student Empowerment) demands for departmental diversity officers. And now, we know MIT has \$15 billion in unrestricted funds that could immediately improve these conditions. Right now, graduate students spend countless hours tracking down delayed paychecks, navigating unexpected medical bills, and appealing for individual pandemic extensions — time we can’t spend advancing research and careers. With a union contract, we can codify our current pay increase, secure guarantees of annual stipend increases and pandemic support, and fight for the same improvements covering everything from affordable housing to fair dispute resolution procedures that unionized graduate workers have won across the country. **With a union, we will make our research the priority.**

Sign a union card today at [mitgsu.org/sign](https://mitgsu.org/sign).

*The authors of this article are members of the MIT Graduate Student Union.*

*Bridget Begg is a seventh-year graduate student in biology.*

*Yadav Gowda is a sixth-year graduate student in linguistics and philosophy and also a member of MIT COVID Relief.*

*Sneha Kabaria is a second-year graduate student in chemical engineering.*

*Pedro Reynolds-Cuellar is a fifth-year graduate student in the Media Lab and also a member of MIT COVID Relief.*

*Gabrielle Robbins is a fifth-year graduate student in history, anthropology, and science, technology, and society and also a member of MIT COVID Relief.*

GUEST COLUMN

# Now is the time for MIT to divest from the fossil fuel industry

*MIT must take responsibility in the crisis*

By Kenny Cox, Mitali Chowdhury, and Alexa Simao

In November 2021, as the world watched, delegates from United Nations countries met in Glasgow for the COP26 conference on climate change in an attempt to limit the global temperature increase to no more than 1.5°C above pre-Industrial Revolution levels. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is increasingly urgent, and fossil fuel companies’ role in perpetuating the climate crisis is crystal clear. However, until the behavior of fossil fuel companies changes, meaningful progress towards combating climate change will remain impossible. The agreement to emerge from COP26 explicitly addressed fossil fuels — unfortunately a first for a climate accord. But even at the very event where this pledge was finally made, the fossil fuel industry sent so many representatives that they outnumbered the delegates from any single country. It is no coincidence that over the course of COP26, the language was watered down between drafts, going from calling for an end to *all* fossil fuel subsidies to only phasing out inefficient ones.

Action to reduce our dependence on polluting energy sources has been too little, too late, with fossil fuel companies blocking much progress. Organizers in the divestment movement seek to address one facet of this issue by removing investments in the fossil fuel industry. Together as the MIT community, we can make the statement that not only are the harmful actions of fossil fuel companies morally inexcusable, and out of line with the urgently necessary global transition to clean energy,

they’re simply a bad investment. As more organizations divest, societal pressure against the bad practices of fossil fuel companies is growing, helping to drive the widespread adoption of sustainable energy sources.

At the forefront of the divestment movement are colleges and universities, including many peers of MIT. In the Boston area, Harvard pledged to divest from fossil fuels Sept. 9, followed shortly by Boston University Sept. 23. Oct. 8, Dartmouth pledged to divest, making it the fifth of eight Ivy League schools to take this important step. Yet as this list continues to grow, where is MIT — a technological leader of the world, a school committed to science and knowledge, and an institution supposedly committed to combating climate change?

In truth, MIT’s current level of response to the climate crisis is inadequate and disappointing compared to the scope of the problem. Nothing short of full divestment and a commitment to pursuing green, equitable energy research would be appropriate. Instead, on the financial side, MIT’s Investment Management Company (MITIMCo) has released a lackluster “Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investment Framework.” MITIMCo prides itself on making investment decisions “based on our knowledge of MIT’s values and the guidance we receive from the Institute’s leadership and governance” but continues to invest in the fossil fuel industry. The Draft Report of the MIT Values Statement Committee offered “Mind, Hand, Heart” as MIT’s motto; surely, investing in an industry known to pollute our planet and lie about its actions, simply to continue

profiting off existing infrastructure, is antithetical to those principles. As fossil fuel companies continue to benefit from investors like MIT and enable the disasters that result from climate change, they continue to inflict harm around the globe.

One counter-argument offered against the prospect of full divestment is that the investments are outside of MITIMCo’s control: they only choose the investment managers, not the ultimate destination of the money. However, this claim does not hold up to scrutiny, since other institutions with similar investment structures as MIT, such as Rutgers, George Washington University, and Cambridge University, have divested. In addition, MIT still has leverage to control which investment managers they hire — and they have a large pool from which to choose. In the past 12 months, MIT received cold emails from 1,800 prospective managers. It is inconceivable that none held values aligned with promoting investment into green energy over fossil fuels. In the 2021 fiscal year, MIT’s endowment experienced an unprecedented 64% increase in its unrestricted funds category, which much of its fossil fuel investment money comes from. There is a choice the Institute must make about where to put those new funds: into destructive fossil-fuel investments, or into industries and activities that support humanity’s future.

Even MIT’s direct response to climate change, in the form of the new Climate Action Plan (CAP), is disappointing and ineffective. Despite the CAP’s strong rhetoric and broad scope of goals, the lack of any aggressive action and measurable accountability is marked. If MIT’s mission really is

to “go as far as we can, as fast as we can,” why do we continue to engage with the industry that has led humanity into this predicament and shown no intentions of changing its toxic behavior? Instead of being a technological and political leader to change the tide of climate change, MIT has once again shown that the institution prioritizes the status quo over meaningful change.

There’s no better time to act than now. As the world races to minimize the catastrophic damage that will be inescapable to future generations if nothing is done, MIT must use every tool at its disposal to aid in the fight against climate change. The majority of MIT’s student body, the Undergraduate Association, and the majority of MIT faculty support divestment. Other community representatives have endorsed divestment, including the Cambridge City Council in a unanimous resolution, and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu has backed the idea and signed an ordinance to divest city investments. As MIT holds onto its increasingly unprofitable fossil fuel investments, those same companies continue to spew out greenhouse gases, sending us all spiraling towards a worse and worse future.

MIT is a leading technical institution primarily because of the brilliant faculty members and students who have come here with an appetite for solving the hardest problems, in service to society. Climate change may be a hard problem to solve, but it is nonetheless a problem that our institution can help rectify in an effective and equitable manner. It is time for MIT to put its money where its mouth is and divest from the fossil fuel industry now.



# #StopAsianHate: A call to action for the MIT community

*UA Diversity Council denounces anti-Asian racism and calls for solidarity with Asian members of the MIT community through collective action*

**By Kelvin Green II and Ishana Shastri**

As written in the Undergraduate Association Diversity Council (UADC) Charter, the UADC is empowered to “craft policy and statements addressed to the Institute”. Recent events, namely the media attention on anti-Asian racism and acts of white supremacy has led UADC to speak with one voice to denounce white supremacy and anti-Asian racism; address the hurt and pain our community feels in the wake of these violent acts; and demonstrate our solidarity with all Asian members of our community.

Undoubtedly, MIT would not be the same without the Asian-American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. The AAPI community is represented in our students, faculty, and administration; our housing staff, dining staff, and lab researchers; as well as first responders and front-line workers in the Cambridge community fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. We acknowledge the pain many members of our community are feeling and also protest the widespread invalidation by the media and others who use sympathetic language in reference to white perpetrators rather than affirming the grief people are grappling with at this time. Whether or not you identify as Asian, it is important to understand in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr, "Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." Silence is violence. To not be actively anti-racist is to be actively complicit in the violence of racism.

We acknowledge the history of anti-Asian racism in America. From the 1854 California Supreme Court ruling (*People v. Hall*) that people of Asian descent could not testify against a White person in court; to the Chinese massacre of 1871 where hundreds of white and Hispanic people entered Old Chinatown in Los Angeles, CA and attacked, bullied, robbed, and murdered Chi-

nese residents in cold blood; to the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibiting the immigration of Chinese laborers; to the Rock Springs massacre of 1885 where 150 white miners brutally attacked their Chinese coworkers forcing them out of the town; to the Japanese internment camps of the 1940s impacting over 100,000 Japanese people; to the murder of Vincent Chin by two white men in 1982; to the overwhelming racism and xenophobia expressed by the former President of the United States in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic; to countless other anti-Asian and racist acts which have not received media coverage or a page in a history book. We also recognize the diversity in the Asian community and protest the historical narrative which limits the perception of Asian to those of East Asian descent and neglects the effect of racism on South Asians.

We also acknowledge the history of racism at MIT. From MIT's relationship with the Wampanoag and Massachusett tribes and the land it currently occupies to the connections our founding president William Barton Rogers had with American chattel slavery; from the perpetuation of the model minority myth to the history of xenophobia and exclusion toward those of Latino descent; all these examples demonstrate MIT's troubling past and present with racism. Although the Institute purports to have made strides toward justice, it still has a long way to go. For far too long, MIT has excused racism, fetishization, and anti-Asian sentiment within the Institute. We must begin to acknowledge that these issues cannot be divorced from our campus.

The UA Diversity Council calls on the MIT senior leadership to demonstrate efforts to hire more AAPI mental health counselors and mental support for underrepresented minorities. Racial trauma is not a new kind

of trauma, and with the recent media attention around racial violence both locally and nationally, MIT should be hiring more counselors who specialize in racial trauma. Moreover, the lack of accessibility to mental health and behavioral services within MIT Medical not only sheds a poor light on MIT's commitment to ensuring positive community morale, but also further stigmatizes requesting mental health support and lifts the already high barrier for underrepresented minorities to seek professional help from mental health services.

We also ask MIT senior leadership to facilitate and host more open spaces for communication regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We ask for more centralized communication, strategy, and planning within the senior leadership, schools, and departments around DEI, instead of our current model of decentralization which has proven time and again to be an impediment in enacting DEI initiatives.

Not only is it important to acknowledge, speak out, and support those affected by injustice, but it is equally pertinent to investigate the breakdown of Asian-American student enrollment at the Institute. Simply stating that 36.1% of the domestic undergraduate population is “Asian” does a disservice to underrepresented ethnicities within the Asian-American community who fall into this aggregation; it also facilitates the trope of a monolithic Asian community dominating higher education. We ask the MIT administration to begin disaggregating demographic data and investigating ways of making more targeted attempts at recruiting and yielding underrepresented ethnicities within the Asian diaspora.

Combating racism and its byproducts is not only the responsibility of MIT senior leadership, but also of every member of our community and beyond. We encour-

age everyone to think about the intersectionalities of identity that are represented in these events. We saw on March 16 how six working-class Asian women aged 33 to 74 were targeted as a byproduct of fetishization and “fixation on sexual temptation.” We saw on April 15 how four members of the Indianapolis Sikh community were targeted in a mass shooting at a local FedEx facility. Not only are these act of white terrorism sickening, but they also demonstrate the role of racism in these events. Racism also exists at MIT. Although MIT takes pride in its diversity, we consistently fail to adequately collect and sufficiently report-out racial and gender data, let alone educate and support those who come from marginalized communities and intersectional identities.

**Signed by:**

- American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
  - Asian American Initiative
  - Biology Undergraduate Students Association
  - Biological Engineering Undergraduate Board
  - Black Womxn's Alliance
  - Chocolate City
  - Civil & Environmental Engineering Student Association
  - FLI@MIT (First-Generation and/or Low Income)
  - G@MIT (Gay At MIT)
  - Interfraternity Council (IFC)
  - Latino Cultural Center
  - Mujeres Latinas
  - Native American Student Association
  - Society of Undergraduate Materials Scientists
  - South Asian Association of Students
- Kelvin Green '22 is Chair of the UA Diversity Council and UA Officer on Diversity.*  
*Ishana Shastri '23 is Vice Chair of the UA Diversity Council.*

## OPEN LETTER

# MIT must not cancel scientific presentations over societal pressure

Dear Dr. van der Hilst,  
I am writing to you as an MIT graduate out of concern for your decision to cancel this year's Carlson Lecture. I know MIT has always been open to men and women from all walks of life and am fine with reviewing whether there are existing policies that would disadvantage any qualified student. However, it is far from clear to me whether

DEI efforts and policies are an improvement or divisive. Of course these are just initials, and the policies and approaches can be constructed differently in different institutions. When something is labeled like this and becomes a movement, I do feel some discomfort. Obviously, you must have felt some pressure by it or the tenets behind it to cancel the lecture.

Professor Dorian Abbot wouldn't have been invited if his scientific work didn't merit the honor. More importantly, I can't find anything to suggest that he is a racist or even biased. Perhaps the Hitler reference he and Stanford professor Iván Marinovic used as an example of an extreme result of distorted values was a bit much, but it isn't his main argument related to academic freedom and achievement.

I have personally witnessed the added stress and anxiety students experience when they are thrust into academic settings for which they are not prepared. MIT's curricula and competition already provide more than enough stress as it is. Let's help better prepare disadvantaged, minority, LGBTQ, etc. students at lower levels so when they are admitted they can compete on an equal footing. If professors aren't even-handed, they should be educated or replaced so there is a level playing field for all students.

I am worried about our society in its readiness to label people or actions as racist, an extreme form of bias. Most people are unaware of their prejudices, which can be modified, if not corrected, simply by bringing their attention to them in a

friendly way. Others are able to evolve from initial prejudices through education and experience. Racists embrace their prejudices consciously and often act on them.

We need to listen to the Abbots and Marinovics even if we don't entirely agree with them. Let's not do anything to limit or stifle scientific work and/or presentations. I have never written a message like this, but when MIT cancels a scientific presentation, I have to write something. We must not give in to social, political, or societal pressures in instances like this.

Sincerely,  
Daniel B. Borenstein '57, MD, FAPA  
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry (Retired), UCLA Geffen School of Medicine  
Past President, American Psychiatric Association

Sincerely,

# Like Alexander Hamilton?

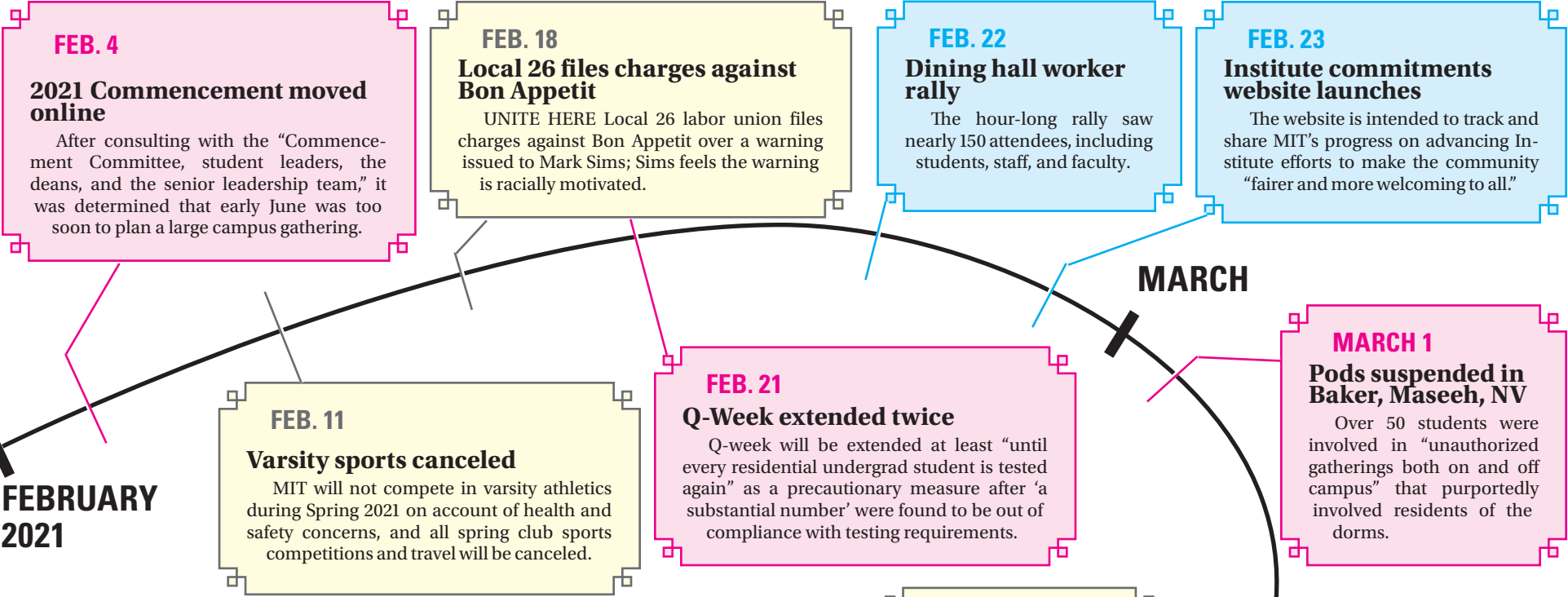
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*The Tech* and earn \$12/hr!

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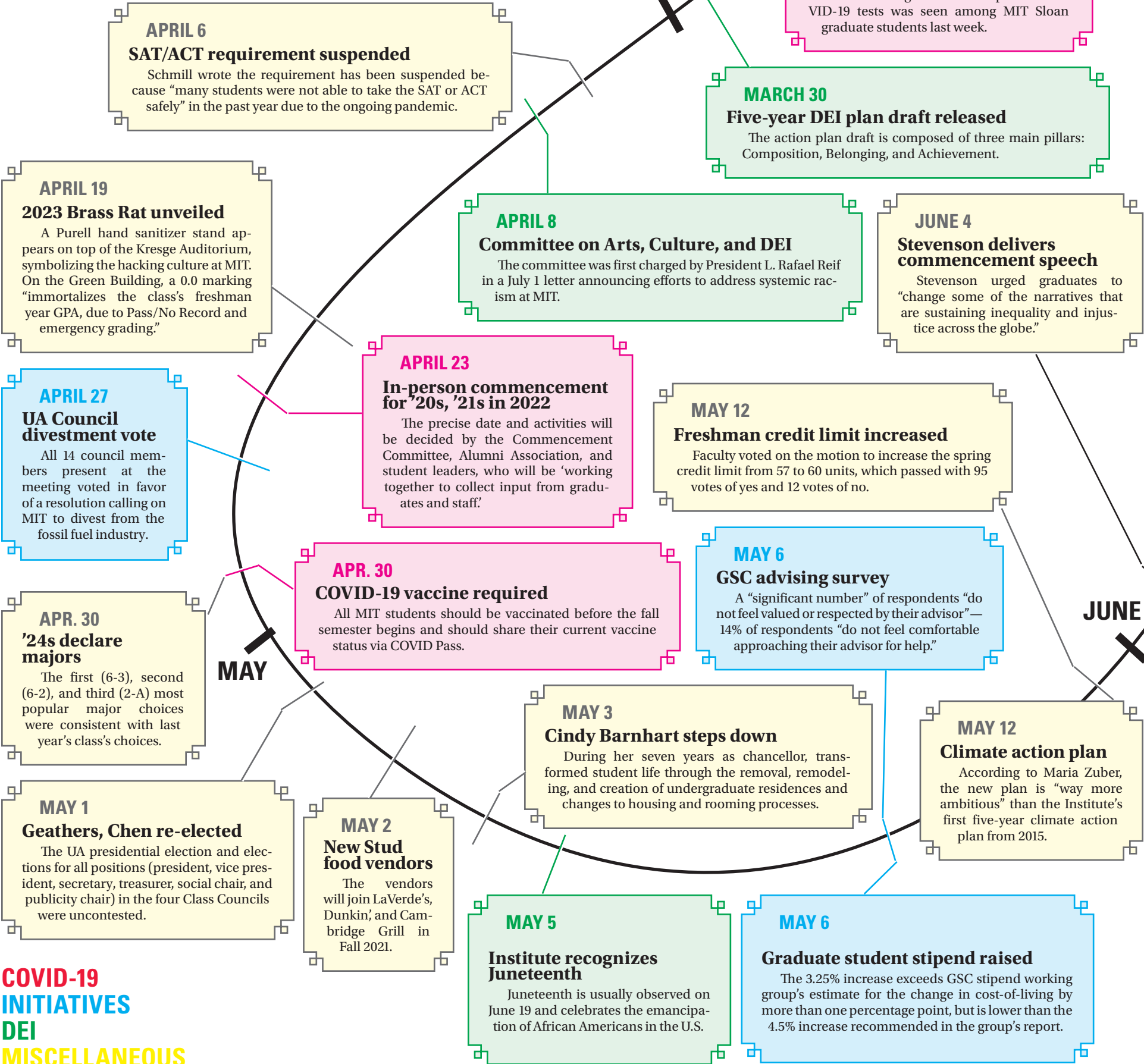




# NEWS IN REVIEW

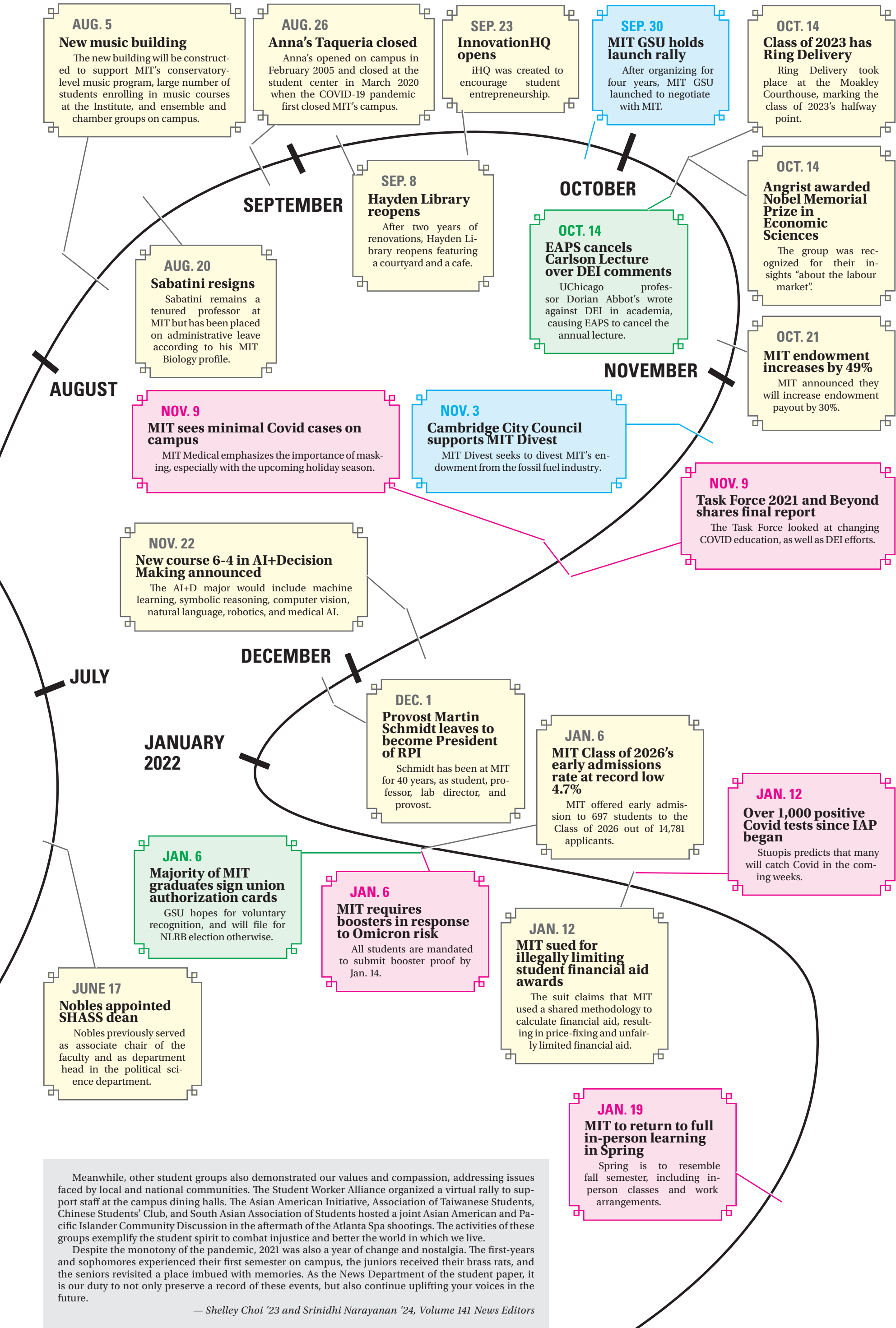
Entering 2021 felt, in many ways, like a nonevent. It was the second year of a global crisis, and while things were certainly not “normal,” they were familiar. It would appear that we were getting used to the pandemic. But familiarity comes with a cost: complacency. As MIT students, we had to be deliberate in improving our student experience even when it was easier to accept the status quo. In this nontraditional year, we fought to strike the perfect balance between the old and the new, to form connections, and to demand more from both ourselves and the Institute.

Student advocacy for housing staple groups and podding privileges demonstrated our commitment to preserving strong communities, while the tireless work of MIT Divest, the Graduate Student Union, and the Undergraduate Association ensured that student voices generated responses from the Institute.



**COVID-19**  
**INITIATIVES**  
**DEI**  
**MISCELLANEOUS**





# NEWS IN REVIEW



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# 2021 in Film and Television

## THE POWER OF THE DOG DIR. JANE CAMPION

*The Power of the Dog* is a quiet but riveting meditation on the definitions of masculinity and family. Jane Campion takes us back to the era of Westerns with gruff cowboys wrangling animals and maidens serving in saloons. Three versions of man are presented: A loving but naive husband (Jesse Plemons), a loyal but violent son (Kodi Smit-McPhee), and a diligent but cruel brother-in-law (Benedict Cumberbatch), all circulating around single mom Rose (Kirsten Dunst). Words are scarce amongst the four, and the little that is said further contributes to Rose's deteriorating mental health. Campion's characters play out the story by looking instead of listening. Observation is crucial to the understanding of the film, and the cast delivers captivating performances through their gazes. A twisted, eerie tale from start to finish, *The Power of the Dog* leaves 2021 with a contemplation on man.



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

— Erika Yang

***DUNE* DIR. DENIS VILLENEUVE**

Audiences waited with bated breath for the arrival of Denis Villeneuve's *Dune*. Adapted from an incredibly complex novel, no one would have been surprised had the film turned out poorly — disappointed yes, but not surprised. Fortunately, Villeneuve surpassed our expectations. Combining tangible special effects and stunning on-location desert shots, *Dune* immediately immerses the audience in the deadly political arena of Arrakis, creating a visual feast. Villeneuve makes the story itself accessible for new fans; despite the many foreign concepts, the film rarely overwhelms the audience. Undaunted by the grand undertaking, Villeneuve created a modern epic that will without a doubt have a significant impact on cinema history.



COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.

— Erika Yang

**TICK, TICK...BOOM! DIR. LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA**

An adaptation of one of the late Jonathan Larson's early works paints a touching tribute to not only the great composer himself, but the musical genre as a whole. Lin-Manuel Miranda goes one step further than a simple adaptation, deciding to interweave songs from the original musical into a depiction of Larson's life. Andrew Garfield greatly impresses with his portrayal of Larson, surprising audiences with a hidden vocal talent and generating a performance remarkably unique from his previous works. *Tick, Tick...Boom!* was an unexpected but welcome entry to 2021's roster, presenting a heartwarming tale of dreams and failure.



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

— Erika Yang

## THE FRENCH DISPATCH DIR. WES ANDERSON

By now, Wes Anderson has established himself in a genre entirely his own — demarcated by saturated color palettes and large ensemble casts — creating absurdist whimsical stories on themes ranging from family to facism. *The French Dispatch* is Anderson's most recent and most "Wes Anderson" film to date, displaying all the characteristics that define the director. Playing with color (or lack of color) and animation, Anderson presents a visual anthology of newspaper headlines in a style of which only he is capable. A stand-out film based on its visuals alone, *The French Dispatch* imbued a unique vibrancy to a downtrodden year.



COURTESY OF SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

—Erika Yang

**SPENCER DIR. PABLO LARRAIN**

Three days, one Diana Spencer, and the rest of the British Royal Family: this is the premise of Pablo Larrain's *Spencer*. A focused feature on the breakdown and liberation of Princess Diana during a Christmas holiday, *Spencer* opts for a different take on a figure whose life has been adapted for film time and time again. Kristen Stewart stars in the titular role and completely transforms into the late princess. The film relies entirely upon her performance, and Stewart delivers in a career-defining role. She captures the acute mannerisms and accent perfectly and engages the audience's sympathy through each of Diana's tribulations. Featuring one of the most memorable performances of the year, *Spencer* is a touching tale of motherhood and the heart-wrenching struggle of isolation.



COURTESY OF NEON

— Erika Yang

**SQUID GAME DIR. HWANG DONG-HYUK**

After more than a decade of production, *Squid Game* entered Netflix's library and was met with viral success. Marbles, dalgona, and Red Light, Green Light dominated the internet and defined global culture in 2021. Its cast (including Hoyeon Jung, Lee Jung-jae, O Yeong-su, and Park Hae-soo) skyrocketed in global fame. O Yeong-su made history recently at the Golden Globes when he became the first South Korean actor to win Best Supporting Actor. Everyone was watching *Squid Game*, and everyone became obsessed — and for good reason. *Squid Game* centered on a group of heavily indebted people playing a rich man's game. It asked its players, what would you do and how far would you go to settle your debts? The nature of the seemingly harmless children's games satirized the realities of capitalism: greed and socioeconomic inequality, among others. An intricately-woven and nail-biting story from beginning to end, *Squid Game* invited its viewers to spectate a game of literal life and death while raising societal questions of money and morals.



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

— Erika Yang



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# It comes in waves

**By Ana Reyes Sánchez**  
*EDITOR*

When I was a freshman, I wrote that MIT was suffocating. I'm drowning in it again.

Days ago, now, my sister came into my room in California to bring me water. She asked me how I was.

I said, "A bit anxious."

My sister asked me what was going on, if I wanted to talk about it.

One. Two.

### Three

FourE

Let the air out, now.

My friend told me that the problem with being on campus is that they are again mourning what we could have had.

And you will wish, more than anything, that you had more time to soothe the grief you know is coming.

I am your future, but in many ways you make up mine. That probably didn't make sense.

That makes you my future.

*"Dear Seven-Year-Old Ana," Blogger Application Pt. 2 Electric Boogaloo*

Whatever the feeling is thrashes in me,  
waves cresting and breaking onto the walls  
of my stomach.

There's a theory, in philosophy, that people can have free will even if all their actions are predestined. Even if everything

*It always gets better, I assure myself.*

The week before I left for Boston, as my dad was leaving for work, I waved with my arms above my head. I was waiting for my mom to come join me on a walk and, all of a sudden, I was struck with the taste of a memory from years ago.

It was a different house, a different garage, different people, and yet the imprint remains.

Two thousand, seven hundred and seventy seven dollars.

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©

...  
I allow myself to digest

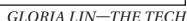
from the inside out.

I have taken a lot more from my family than money, but I did not know that then.

Am I coming or leaving home, this time?  
Ruth tells me that I can always make a  
home again. I, not we.

■ **Life is short, though I keep this from my**

## RAT-ULATIONS



estimate, though I keep this from my children.

For every loved child, a child broken,  
bagged,

though I keep this from my children. **I am trying**

**“Good Bones,”** *Maggie Smith*

There is no one left to care for them.

When the seniors I'd gotten to know in the math department graduated, I wrote to one of

May, 2021

Everything swirls back and forth in my brain.

When I touched down in Boston for the





# Reset

Can't we make it stop, for just a minute

**By Paige Bright**  
*STAFF WRITER*

In TV shows, there's this cliché. Two characters (no matter their relationship) get into a fight and after some amount of time (whether it be a few episodes or an entire season), they decide that they want to move on. Except they don't quite know how. It would be all too simple to just have one character say their actions were wrong; after extended fights like this, usually both parties are to blame for the situation in some respect. And so, through desperation (and possibly lazy writing), one character walks up to the other and says, "Hi. I'm [insert name here]. I don't think we've met."

They, much like the audience, want things to go back the way they were, give or take the minor/major dysfunctional aspects of the relationship. People like clean breaks. Ripping the bandaid off, no anesthesia. A nice reset button, in which everything is magically fixed, and everyone moves on.

I've been wanting to walk up to MIT, shake her hand, and say "Hi. I'm Paige. I don't think we've met."

I had a bad freshman year. I have been trying to accept this statement for a while now, yet every time it crosses my mind, I just can't process it. Recently, I remembered that *something* was off last year. Everyone was hosed — this much I knew — but this was different. I think it's relatively common to voluntarily hose yourself — with too many classes, too many clubs, too many bad decisions. But this was different. *Something* was off. Then, I started looking through my past writing and remembered. It felt like no one cared.

we didn't get a spring break. Instead, we had a series of three-day weekends spread out over the course of a semester. This time off evolved into extra time for psetting and no time to destress. This sentiment was expressed everywhere I looked: *The Tech*, PNR Comics, MIT Admissions blogs, MIT Confessions. I just kept thinking:

Everyone knows how much pain we are in. Can't we make it end, for just a minute?

But this never happened. The world kept on spinning, and we pushed through. And I forgot. I forgot the pain, the agony, the resentment. Towards myself, for putting myself through that.

*Should I have taken a gap year?*  
Resentment towards MIT for letting it happen.

*Do something. Do anything.*

Mostly, I just felt numb. I understood the emotions of hating a world I worked so hard to be a part of, but I just never felt them. How could I have? There isn't enough time; the world keeps on spinning. But that was the COVID era. Things this semester were going to be different. They needed to be. Someone was going to care.

I wanted to forget what last year was like. I wanted to start fresh. "Hi. I'm Paige. I don't think we've met."

This never works in TV shows. Eventually, the characters fight again, and words left unsaid bubble to the surface leaving a bad taste in your mouth. From here, the TV cliché can go one of two ways. Either the characters reflect on how much they've grown and move past this (now understood to be) petty argument for the better, or their relationship doesn't make it past another round of fighting.

I was desperate enough to ask for a reset



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GLORIA LIN—THE TECH

**I was desperate enough** to ask for a reset.

— desperate enough to forget. A nice clean break from the hell that was last year, in hopes that this semester I could start fresh. MIT hasn't changed. This is still the same relationship. We are burdened by the knowledge and experiences we wish to forget.

MIT will always be a struggle. Perhaps this statement would be easier to accept if last year was in person. I was more likely to feel alone and unseen when struggling

in an online environment. But now, it feels like I was blindsided twice: once with the innocence of a freshman, and once again with the innocence of a sophomore excited to have things finally improve. Was I naive to hope for improvement? Did I truly think things could be better? I don't know. Everything feels just *slightly* off. It would be naive not to acknowledge this. There will be no clean break, and no hard reset.

Hi. I'm Paige. We've met.

## VIVIAN'S REFLECTIONS

# What P/NR taught me

Looking on the bright side, practicing self-care, and more lessons from first semester

**By Vivian Hir**

*Your instructor has released grade changes and new comments for Midterm 1.* Seeing that email, I felt dread. I knew that I had done poorly on my 5.07 (Introduction to Biological Chemistry) midterm. I didn't want to see my grade, yet I wanted to know what I got. My fingers shook as I opened the website and the moment I saw my score, my heart sank. Seventy out of 100. A C-. The lowest test grade I had ever scored. Below average. While I was still absorbing the fact that I didn't do well, a voice inside of me whispered, "At least I am on Pass/No Record (P/NR)." This fact raised questions that I used to ignore. Shouldn't I be glad that I got a passing score in my class? Why was I letting a number define me so much?

The more I pondered my attitude towards grades throughout the day, the more I thought about how hard it was to remove

my unhealthy fixation on grades. Ever since middle school, I had viewed grades as a reflection of my self-worth and intelligence. I objectively knew that my attitude was not right, yet I found it challenging to break free from this mindset that I had held for many years. After reflecting upon my realization that day, I decided that now was the time for me to change this negative mindset. I couldn't keep delaying this moment.

A few weeks after seeing my score, I gradually began to fully embrace P/NR instead of telling myself to get As in everything. Despite this change, I still tried my best on the second midterm for 5.07. When I saw my score of 74, I had an unexpected reaction, but in a good way. Normally, I would have been very sad and remained shell-shocked about how I didn't do well on a test. This time, however, I focused more on the positive. "Well, at least I improved by four points," I told myself.

"Also, this class is not designed for first-year students."

P/NR made me aware of the importance of self-care, a practice that I tended to overlook in high school. I realized for the first time that instead of expecting myself to get everything right the first time, I should accept the fact that I would make mistakes along the way. MIT has P/NR for first-semester freshmen for a reason. The transition from high school to college is quite big and involves not only adjusting to more difficult curricula but also various aspects of college life, such as living in a dorm and learning how to be an adult. If it weren't for P/NR, I would still be obsessing over itty-bitty points I lost or fussing about small things like missing a question on a problem set. In other words, not having P/NR would allow my high school mindset to persist. I highly doubt that I would have otherwise taken the time to pause and question

whether my approach towards learning was ideal.

Besides encouraging me to adopt a healthier mindset when it comes to academics, P/NR has taught me to embrace a lifestyle that has a balance of work and fun. A year ago, I found the idea of giving myself unstructured free time on the weekends unimaginable. Now, however, I force myself to leave campus every once in a while to explore my surroundings, from the Museum of the Fine Arts to the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

Because of P/NR, I am better at telling myself that there is more to life than grades and test scores. Four years of undergrad may sound like a long time, but in reality it is short, so I had better live my college experience to the fullest. I want to look back on my college years not with remorse for caring too much about getting all As, but rather with happiness about the unforgettable memories I formed here.

